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WASHINGTON MEETINGS.

During the past year six meetings have been held by the Washington members of the American Statistical Association. The papers submitted have been as follows :—

December 31, 1896.—Opening address by President Francis A. Walker. (Printed in March Number.) “Plan for a Permanent Census Service,” by Col. Carroll D. Wright.

January 25, 1897.—“Some Aspects of Our Foreign Trade,” by Mr. Worthington C. Ford.

February 22, 1897.—Eulogies of the late Francis A. Walker, President of the Association. Addresses by Prof. Henry Gannett and Mr. Victor H. Olmsted.

March 22, 1897.—“Some Characteristics of Farm and Home Proprietors,” by Mr. George K. Holmes.

April 26, 1897.—“Statistical Illustrations,” by Prof. Henry Gannett.

May 27, 1897.—“Location of Life Insurance Policy-holders in the United States,” by Mr. Henry Farquhar ; “Some Considerations in Gathering Forestry Statistics,” by Prof. B. E. Fernow.

MUNICIPAL STATISTICAL OFFICES.

Dr. Edward M. Hartwell, recently appointed Secretary of the Department of Statistics of Boston, in the summer of 1896 visited the principal municipal statistical offices of Europe, and has submitted his investigations in a special report to the Mayor (Boston City Document, No. 94, 1897). His conclusions are as follows :—

Municipal statistics are more comprehensive, various, and scientifically presented on the continent of Europe than is the case in Great Britain or the United States. The continental municipal statistical offices present certain characteristics, as a class, that are significant and noteworthy. (1) They are apparently independent and self-contained ; (2) they are more closely connected with the executive and administrative departments of the city government than with any other ; (3) they are organized as permanent scientific bureaus, under the responsible charge of highly trained specialists, who,

by reason of their character, ability, and standing, command the respect of their colleagues and of the public; (4) their jurisdiction is so well defined, and their work so systematized, that they accomplish a great amount of routine work and of independent research with a comparatively small staff of subordinate assistants and clerks; (5) their publications, being models in respect to comprehensiveness, conciseness, and trustworthiness, are of more than local value, and are serviceable for the purposes of the comparative student of municipal life and development, be he sanitarian, politician, economist, or sociologist.

The statistical offices of the leading German cities are so well organized that, through the co-operation of their directors, there is now published a *Statistical Year-Book of German Cities*, which was established in 1891. This work contains a valuable series of comparative tables upon certain standard subjects of statistical inquiry, such as are contained in the statistical year-books whose rubrics I have enumerated; and from time to time special subjects of statistical interest are contained in this year-book.

It would be impossible, under present conditions, to publish a similar work for English cities or for American cities; yet both in the case of British and American cities the public documents published by the various departments and bureaus of their respective governments contain a great deal of statistical matter. But statistical information concerning the various departments of city activity and housekeeping is now so scattered in the publications of our American municipalities that its value is materially diminished. It is manifestly in the interest of public policy that well-digested statistical tables, both of detailed and summary nature, should be prepared by competent hands, and set forth in compact, convenient form for the information of city officials and the electorate.

The establishment by American cities of a statistical bureau, which would serve as a clearing-house for all their statistics, would conduce greatly to increasing intelligent interest on the part of the citizens at large in public affairs, and would also facilitate what is greatly needed, — the dissemination of accurate official statistical reports for the benefit of students of municipal and economic affairs. At present, persons who desire complete information concerning city finances, school affairs, vital statistics, etc., etc., for a period of years, are

obliged to search in a great variety of documents for the data necessary to afford a comparative view of the development of municipal housekeeping.

It is especially noteworthy that the population statistics gathered and published by the municipal statistical offices on the continent are valuable and complete ; much more so than is commonly the case with such statistics in this country. The fact that the census of cities like Berlin, Paris, Budapest, etc., are prepared by their respective municipal statistical offices under the direction of permanent and highly trained officials adds largely to their value. It is also noteworthy that statistics regarding movement of the population and the public health are much fuller, more detailed and valuable than those commonly published in this country. Not only are the vital statistics fuller and more completely analyzed, but statistics regarding persons suffering from different forms of disease are more comprehensive than those usually found in the public documents which issue from American city offices. This is partly due to the more complete system of civil registration which obtains in all continental cities, but it appears to be also largely due to the fact that officials and the public are more interested in receiving complete and regular information concerning the ravages of death and the condition of the public health. The weekly, monthly, and quarterly publications of most continental statistical offices present remarkably full and well-digested statements concerning morbidity as well as mortality statistics. The value of such statistics as a means to judging the condition of the environment of municipal population can hardly be overestimated. Reforms of far-reaching and permanent value have been instituted in several instances as a result of the mortality and morbidity statistics published by municipal statistical offices. The showing of the statistical bureau of Budapest, for instance, with regard to the amount of illness and death in low and ill-ventilated dwellings has had a marked influence in causing reform and improvement in the building laws of that city. The studies of Director Böckh, of the Berlin Statistical Office, with regard to the comparative mortality of infants fed upon different articles of food are extremely interesting and of great scientific value.

It is possible for a well-conducted municipal statistical office to render most valuable assistance to the heads of all departments of

city affairs, as well as to enable the chief magistrates of cities to acquire ready and accurate information upon a great number of subjects of vital importance. A catalogue of the special independent studies, published separately from the regular publications of the statistical offices, which I have considered, would indicate the helpful character of such offices in acquiring and spreading information of a special character upon subjects which are usually left with us to private students.

In their aims, organization, and achievements the leading municipal statistical offices on the continent of Europe betoken a more highly developed state of municipal life and organization than has yet been attained elsewhere. In the sphere of municipal administration such offices serve much the same purpose as does the "headquarters staff" in the administration of modern military affairs. That is to say, being organized as "intelligence departments," they furnish the executive department of the city government with such information as it requires for devising and conducting its plan of campaign against ignorance, disease, crime, pauperism, and extravagance.

Through their publications such offices are also capable of rendering important aid to the electorate in arriving at intelligent conclusions as to the degree of fidelity and efficiency shown by its public servants in the discharge of their duties.

Experience has shown that city statistical offices, such as are described in the foregoing pages, constitute an important and effectual aid to the intelligent, practical, and economical conduct of municipal business and housekeeping. The establishment by Boston and other great cities of the United States of similar offices could hardly fail to conduce to better government and a more enlightened public spirit, provided the teachings of the best European experience in this field were clearly apprehended and consistently applied in their organization and management.